

Committee: Children and Young People's Scrutiny Panel

Date: 21st March 2017

Wards: All

Subject: Looked After Children and Care Leavers Sufficiency Strategy 2017-18

Lead officer: Liz Broughton, Head of Access to Resources

Lead member: Cllr Katy Neep, Cabinet Member for Children's Services

Contact officer: Liz Broughton, Head of Access to Resources

Recommendations:

- A. For the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Panel to discuss and comment on issues relating to sufficiency of placements for Care Leavers and Young People.
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1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. To inform a discussion with members in regards to the LA's statutory duty to ensure sufficient placement availability for children looked after and care leavers.
- 1.2. The authority is required to produce a sufficiency statement. This is presented in full in Appendix A. A key summary of the pertinent details are in section 2 below

2 DETAILS

- 2.1. The London Borough of Merton is the Corporate Parent for the children and young people that are placed in its care by means of care orders or voluntary accommodation. The term Corporate Parent, put simply, means that Merton wants everything that a good parent wants for their child for the children in its care, and commits the resources and efforts of the council to achieving the very best that can be achieved for each child. This includes supporting our looked after young people into independence as they become Care Leavers. Being a good Corporate Parent requires a whole systems approach across the council and all of its elected members and employees, in partnership with education, health, police and other agencies and individuals with responsibility for the safety and wellbeing of Children Looked After and Care Leavers. The delivery of services to children and young people in care requires procedures, processes and systems to ensure that their needs are met to a high standard, but alongside this organisational activity, and underpinning this activity, the Corporate Parent must demonstrate to each child in its care that they are loved and cherished. Merton aspires to nothing less, and requires this standard of Corporate Parenting from every member and employee of the council.
- 2.2. One area of importance is to ensure that all of our looked after children and young people are provided with good quality, safe placements appropriate to their needs that allows them to develop the skills necessary to move into adulthood when they are ready to do so. The Sufficiency Statement sets out

Merton's strategic approach to securing sufficient accommodation to meet the needs of our looked after children. The council has a duty, as stated in section 22G of the Children Act 1989, to take steps to secure, as far as reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation for looked after children within their local authority area. The 2010 guidance on the 'sufficiency duty' states that local authorities should have embedded plans, as part of their commissioning processes and through partnership working, to meet the duty.

- 2.3. In Merton we undertake a needs analysis and review our Sufficiency Strategy on an annual basis. The 2017/18 statement reflects information on children, young people and care leavers looked after during 2015/16.

General Demographics- Key Findings

- 2.4. In 2015/16, we commissioned 410 placements (used by 273 children)
- 2.5. 163 children remained in placements open at 31 March 2016
- 2.6. One-third of placements were for children aged 16 years and over at placement start date (140 out of 410 placements; 34%)
- 2.7. More females entered care (16 more females than previous year) – there was an additional 26 placements for females (up three percentage points from 2014-15)
- 2.8. Nearly half of all placements used by children who are eligible for Pupil Premium (190 out of 410 placements; 46%)
- 2.9. One in six placements are used by children with either a Statement of SEN or an EHC Plan (68 out of 410 placements; 17%) – 44 children with a Statement of SEN or an EHC Plan
- 2.10. Of the 68 placements used by children with either a Statement of SEN or an EHC Plan, nearly half related to children with a primary SEN need of Social, Emotional and Mental Health (32 out of 68 placements; 47%)
- 2.11. Three-quarters of placements during 2015-16 located within 10 miles of child's home address (270 out of 367 placements matched; 74%)
- 2.12. One-third of placements during 2015-16 located in Merton (130 out of 410 placements; 32%)
- 2.13. 37% children placed as at 31 March 2016 had been in the same placement for 1 year or longer (61 out of 163 children)
- 2.14. One-third of placements ceasing during 2015-16 lasted for less than 1 month (83 out of 247 placements ceased; 34%)
- 2.15. During 2015/16, of the 273 children looked after, 80 belonged to 33 sibling groups.
- 2.16. 67% of the sibling groups were placed together (22 out of 33 sibling groups).
- 2.17. 17 children in care (as at 31 March 2016) using three or more placements during 2015-16
- 2.18. A variety of different placements are commissioned for our looked after children and young people, depending on their specific needs. In this period the significant majority of children were placed with in-house foster carers in

keeping with Merton's values and the needs of the children. The second greatest numbers of children were placed with foster carers from private agencies. Fostering is overwhelmingly the environment most closely matched to the needs of the greatest number of children and young people. The increase of children placed in children's homes has been under review to ensure that children are appropriately placed, and that their plans for transition to fostering or other types of accommodation are being progressed appropriate to their assessed needs.

Key Findings: Foster Care

- 2.19. 163 In-House foster care placements were made during 2015-16 (40% of all placements during 2015-16)
- 2.20. 69 children in In-House foster care placements remain open at 31 March 2016
- 2.21. 40% of In-House foster care placements were for children aged over 12 years old at placement start date (65 out of 163 placements)
- 2.22. 53% of In-House foster placements were used by children eligible for Pupil Premium (87 out of 163 placements)
- 2.23. 7% of In-House foster placements were used by children with either a Statement of SEN or an EHC Plan (11 out of 163 placements)
- 2.24. 96% of In-House foster care placements during 2015-16 were located within 10 miles of child's home address (136 out of 141 placements matched)
- 2.25. Two-thirds of In-House foster care placements during 2015-16 were located in Merton (103 out of 163 placements; 63%)
- 2.26. 41% Looked After Children placed in an In-House foster placement as at 31 March 2016 had been in the same placement for 1 year or longer (28 out of 69 children)
- 2.27. One-third of In-House foster care placements ceasing during 2015-16 lasted for less than 1 month (33 out of 94 placements ceased; 35%)
- 2.28. 12 sibling groups were placed together in In-House foster care placements during 2015-16
- 2.29. 18 (26%) children were placed with in house carers were in permanent placements

What we will do in 2017/18

- 2.30. We will continue to target our recruitment of foster carers to provide more carers for teenagers aged 12+ of either gender to meet the increased need for in house carers for this age group. The recruitment target for 2016/17 target is 15 carers with at least 7 for target groups of teenagers. Recruiting foster carers for teenagers is a challenge as there is a competitive market with IFAs and other local authorities also trying to build up their own provision.
- 2.31. Although we are confident that we are able to promote Merton as the local authority of choice for prospective foster carers, we will continue to benchmark this by offering:
 - a) quick, well managed recruitment processes and assessments

- b) good quality support to our carers
 - c) regular review to ensure competitive fostering rates in relation to local neighbours
- 2.32. We will be proactive in working in consortium arrangements to consider smarter ways of commissioning placements
- 2.33. We will maximise the use of our in house placements for all of our looked after children and young people by ensuring that as part of the annual review processes for foster carers, we will continue to ensure that we have carers with as wide an approval range as possible to provide flexibility and opportunities when placement finding.

Key Findings: Children's Homes

- 2.34. 46 Children's Home placements were commissioned during 2015-16 (11% of all placements during 2015-16)
- 2.35. 27 Children were placed in Children's Home placements as at 31 March 2016
- 2.36. Nearly two-thirds of Children's Homes placements during 2015-16 were for children aged 12 to 15 years old at start of placement (27 out of 46 placements; 59%)
- 2.37. 72% of Children's Homes placements during 2015-16 were for males (33 out of 46 placements)
- 2.38. Two-thirds of Children's Home placements during 2015-16 were for disabled children (31 out of 46 placements; 67%)
- 2.39. The majority of Children's Homes placements during 2015-16 were located 20 miles or further from home address (31 out of 46 placements; 67%)

What we will do in 2017/18

- 2.40. We will explore the reasons for our increase in the use of Children's Homes
- 2.41. We will review all existing young people placed in Children's Homes with a view to considering step down arrangements through our new Placements Panel
- 2.42. We will work with existing and new providers within 5 miles of Merton to develop closer commissioning relationships.
- 2.43. We will continue to work with providers to ensure quality and best value of placements through regular quality assurance visits and robust fee negotiations both on placement and at key points during changes in service delivery.
- 2.44. We will be proactive in working in consortium arrangements to consider smarter ways of commissioning placements.
- 2.45. Merton is represented on the London Care Placements Fee negotiations panel and will continue to drive to maintain standard, costs and to identify new possible providers near to the borough.
- 2.46. We will develop new consortium working arrangements with colleagues to ensure best practice in the field of commissioning residential children's homes placements.

Key Findings: 16+ Semi-Independent Provision for 16/17 year olds

- 2.47. 61 Semi-Independent placements were commissioned during 2015-16 (15% of all placements during 2015-16).
- 2.48. 16 Children were placed in Semi-Independent placements as at 31 March 2016.
- 2.49. The majority of 16+ Semi-Independent placements during 2015-16 were for children aged 17 years old at start of placement (49 out of 61 placements; 80%).
- 2.50. 97% of 16+ Semi-Independent placements during 2015-16 were located outside of Merton local authority boundary (59 out of 61 placements) although 82% were located within 10 miles of their home address (40 out of 49 placements matched).
- 2.51. Three-quarters of Looked After Children in 16+ Semi-Independent Provision as at 31 March 2016 had been in the same placement for less than six months (12 out of 16 children; 75%).

What we will do

- 2.52. We will review our use of the semi-independent market for our looked after young people and care leaver to ensure that use of this provision is time-limited and is used as a step into independent living.
- 2.53. We will continue to work closely with well-developed semi-independent and housing providers to enable them to support young people remaining within Merton including Grenfell who has recently (September 2016) opened a semi-independent unit in Merton for young people aged 16+
- 2.54. We will continue to embed our financial framework with providers to ensure that we are getting best value for placements made.

Key Findings: Care Leavers 2015-16

- 2.55. Merton had responsibility for 150 Care Leavers aged 18 to 21 years old during 2015-16
- 2.56. 66 young people are using semi-independent provision (44% 66 out of 150)
- 2.57. 87% of Care Leavers aged 18 to 21 were 'in touch' with Merton CSF (130 out of 150 Care Leavers)
- 2.58. 93% of 'In-touch' Care Leavers aged 18 to 21 were residing in suitable accommodation at point of contact (121 out of 130 In-touch Care Leavers)
- 2.59. Majority of In-touch 18 and 19 year old care leavers were residing in 16+ Semi-Independent provision at point of contact.

What we will do

- 2.60. We will continue to embed our financial framework with providers to ensure that we are getting best value for placements made.
- 2.61. We will work closely with providers who can offer temporary housing for our young people

- 2.62. We will work more closely with colleagues in C&H to access the Shared Lives Scheme where appropriate for our most vulnerable young people and care leavers

3 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 3.1. Options to deliver sufficiency are within the report.

4 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

- 4.1. This report has been considered at the Corporate Parenting Board.

5 TIMETABLE

- 5.1. This report is refreshed annually.

6 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1. Financial implications are referenced within the report in Appendix A.

7 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1. The council has a duty, as stated in section 22G of the Children Act 1989, to take steps to secure, as far as reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation for looked after children within their local authority area. The 2010 guidance on the 'sufficiency duty' states that local authorities should have embedded plans, as part of their commissioning processes and through partnership working, to meet the duty.

8 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1. Analysis of the children and their needs takes full account of equalities implications.

9 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1. Not relevant for this report.

10 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1. Not relevant for this report.

11 APPENDICES – THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS ARE TO BE PUBLISHED WITH THIS REPORT AND FORM PART OF THE REPORT

APPENDIX A: SECURING SUFFICIENT ACCOMMODATION FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN AND CARE LEAVERS 2017 – 2018 LONDON BOROUGH OF MERTON

12 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 12.1. None